

# BaptistWay Bible Series for August 1: Engaging in honest and just business practices

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This lesson could be awfully boring. It could be as rote as anything we teach in Sunday school. We could teach it along lines something like this: “Don’t cheat. Be honest in everything you do.”

Of course, such a lesson would be entirely biblical. The problem would not be in the substance of what is taught—the problem would be in what would be left out.

It is easy for all of us churchgoers to give lip service to the concept of honest business dealings. You will not get any debate from your class if you keep the discussion at the level of “should we be honest or not.”

The real issues for 21st century Christians are three: 1. What do we mean by “honest”? 2. How much should our faith affect our business affairs? 3. How essential is our business life to our faith life?

## **What do we mean by “honest”? (Proverbs 11:1)**

There is not much interpretation to do with this verse. Cheating is abominable. God delights in accuracy.

Honesty in our business dealings means more than omitting lies. We have a Christian obligation of integrity. Our integrity is tied up in our truth-telling, to be sure, but integrity involves so much more.

- **Accuracy.** We are not simply answering direct questions without lying but in fact affirmatively making sure that everything we say and do is

correct to the best of our ability.

- ***Trustworthiness.*** We are not simply correct but are persons who keep confidences, who give worthwhile and needed advice, and whose word can be valued.

- ***Credibility.*** We demonstrate wholeness in how we conduct our business so that each thing we do supports who we are and claim to be. By being truthful and showing integrity on one matter, we are that much more likely to be relied upon in the next matter.

- ***Sincerity.*** Integrity is not simply saying the right things, but obviously believing what we say and living out what we say so that our customers, clients, co-workers, superiors and reports all know exactly who and whose we are.

- ***Competence.*** We have a duty to do everything “as unto the Lord.” We are to be the best we can be. We should do our jobs well. Trying to be honest is not very helpful if we have built or bought a poor scale.

- ***Fairness.*** We simply must treat everyone the same. We are credible because those with whom we do business know they are getting a fair shake.

- ***Reasonableness.*** There are many times in business dealings—whether we are the customer or the seller, the client or the professional, the boss or the underling—where being right is not the end of the story. Those are the times where agree to a reasonable solution—often a compromise that costs us something—in an effort to effect the greater good in our relationship.

Yes, God delights in an accurate scale, but what this Proverb really means is that God delights in his child who demonstrates integrity in all she does.

**How much should our faith affect our business affairs? (Micah**

## **2:1-3)**

Once again, of course, the answer to this one is, on its face, easy. Our faith should control and influence everything we do, including our business affairs. In point of fact, of course, we all struggle with bringing our faith into the workplace.

Sometimes the struggle is one of identification—we do not want those around us to label us as a Christian and stick us with all of the stereotypes that go with that in our particular workplace. Hopefully, most of us are beyond this fear, but it is a real concern in many workplaces that, in order to get along and perhaps to get promoted, we may feel that we need to be seen as one of the crowd and not somebody who stands out in any sort of potentially-offensive way.

The struggle often has nothing to do with self-consciousness about how we are perceived but rather in an honest misperception—we simply do not see our workplace as anything God cares about. Does God care how these numbers add up, or how this tire gets put on this car or how I ring up this sale? The answer is yes, but that can be hard to see in the moment. Our work can seem mundane or even boring.

The truth of the matter is that those of us who work outside the home spend, on average, three times as many waking hours with those whom we see at work than we do with those at home. To suppose God is unconcerned with how we spend that time and how we interact with those folks is to minimize our importance to God.

This Scripture from Micah emphasizes how God is watching our deeds, and more importantly, our hearts as we perform our work. We must approach these tasks in light of and influenced by God. Indeed, God approaches them in light of our faith.

## **How essential is our business life to our faith life? (Micah 6:8-15)**

The story is told of the line of Baptists at the pearly gates, having arrived together after a bus accident. One person, near the back of the line, sees Baptist after Baptist get directed toward heaven by Saint Peter but say, as they walk toward the golden streets, “Aw shucks.” This person gets out of line and asks one of the Baptist before he enters heaven what the problem is, and the response surprises him: “We just found out that Sundays and Wednesday nights don’t count extra!”

God has shown us what is good: justice, mercy/kindness, humility as we walk with God. Can we leave these things out of our business? Can we go to work and leave justice and kindness at home? Dare we choose not to walk with God—much less walk humbly with God—while we are at the office?

God is involved integrally with every part of our lives. Sundays (and even the occasional Wednesday nights) are important parts of our spiritual lives, but that is all they are: parts of our spiritual lives. What God asks for is our whole walk. God wants us to do justice and to love kindness wherever we are. When we do not, God notices.